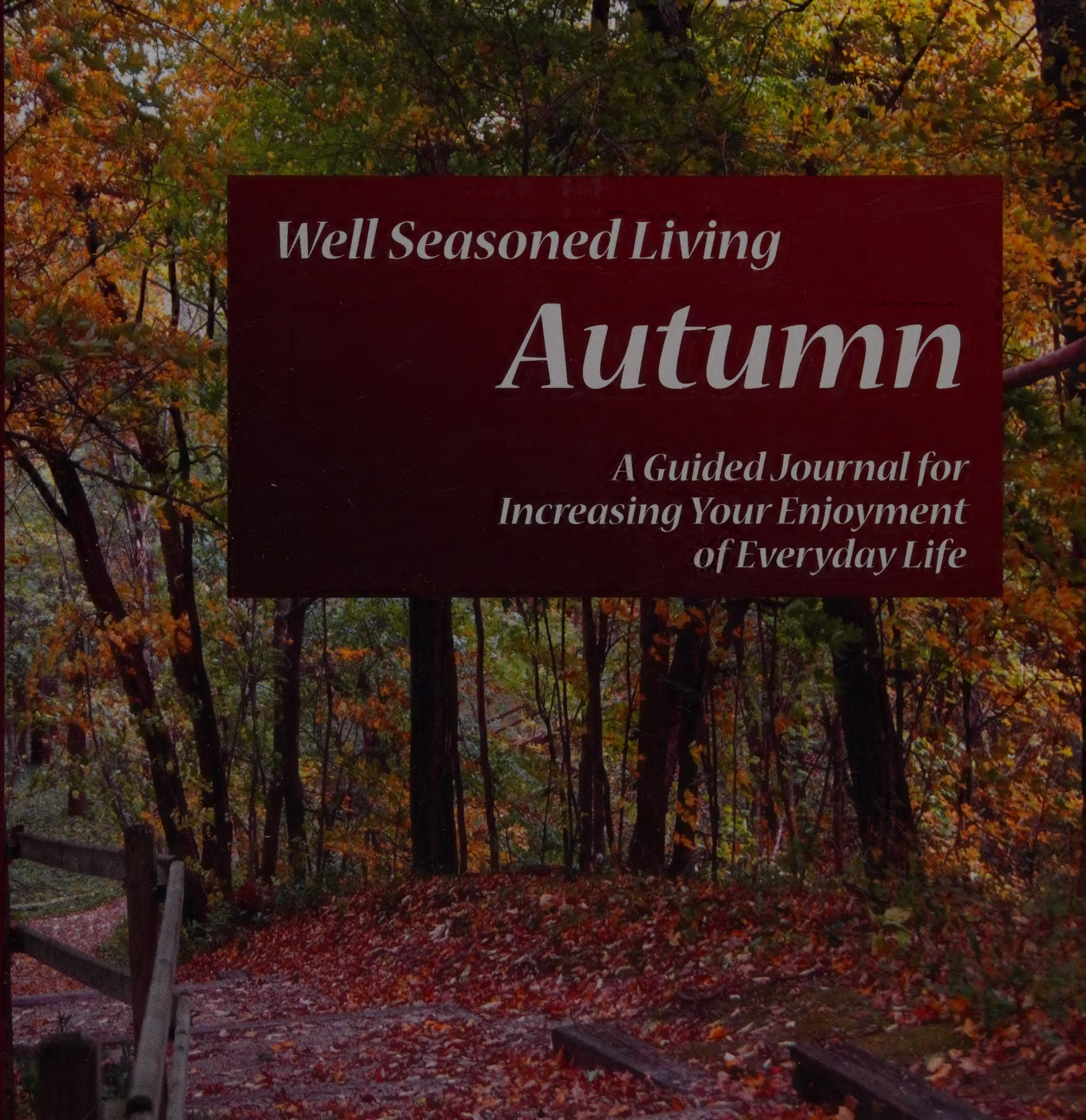

Well Seasoned Living

Autumn

A Guided Journal for Increasing Your Enjoyment of Everyday Life

WELL SEASONED LIVING: AUTUMN
A Guided Journal for Increasing Your Enjoyment of Everyday Life

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Writings by Vicki Kessler
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Introduction

Each season – full of change and promise – greets us with an opportunity for spiritual and emotional growth. Within the graceful boundaries of each season, days and nights unfold in rhythms unique to the time at hand. So, too, do our own lives with their projects and plans that spiral outward and inward. It is no small task to pause and examine our experiences. In seeking greater understanding, we identify and claim the moments of our days and nights in ways that help us make meaning from their ever-shifting content. By engaging that task in partnership with the greater energies that flow around us, we can establish the context of a witnessing reality. At any moment we will have companions available for our life journey.

Awareness is the task of this journal. Through photographs and poetry, you are invited to move through each season. We provide you with questions and activities to help you practice these four essential movements: anticipate, attend, appreciate, accept. Giving time and energy to this practice facilitates clarity and insight. Recognizing the power and magnitude of your unique presence and energy in the universe, you can receive the wonder and beauty of well seasoned living.

Autumn is a time to savor shifting energy. Lingering in the remnants of warmth, we begin to witness nature's peak colors. Our delight emerges like the forming seed pods as we go forward through the days, relishing the rich and maturing harvest. Fall fruits and vegetables spill across our tables. Beautiful leaf colors, highlighted against bright blue skies, call us to pause and admire nature's handiwork. Rose hips and shrubbery berries feed the migrating birds. Working with the energy of gratitude, this journal encourages you to reflect on what lies within your own life. We suggest ways to draw out inner resources and practice growth as you move through autumn.

There are twenty-four photos and meditations. Your rhythm of reflection and engagement are for you to decide, but if you wish to proceed at a routine pace, you'll have two opportunities per week during the autumn for your focused work.

We hope you enjoy your journal, and the practice of well seasoned living!

Working Through Guided Reflections

Guided reflection is a process that can facilitate our thinking and deepen our understanding of daily life choices. The process allows for thoughtful deliberation as we seek fulfillment. Guided reflection builds upon our core selves, valuing them in ways that enhance human growth and potential.

There are four components provided to assist in your guided reflection: a photograph, a poem, reflection questions and an engagement exercise. You may enjoy any of them singularly, or in some combination that best enhances your involvement with the season. For those who are visual learners, time spent with the photograph might be most rewarding. For the introspective personality, pondering the poetry or giving fifteen or twenty minutes to writing reflections might prove satisfying. For the activity oriented person, the engagements provide an opportunity to do and move.

Because this book is interactive, you can add activities, invent your own poetry or insert your own photographs or sketches. You might collect mementos of the season that make it very personally your own and attach them in the blank space.

Accept whatever occurs in your response to the photos, poetry, reflections or engagement. Observe, record, learn and enhance your awareness as you practice well seasoned living.

The Rhythms

Each moment of our life moves in synchronicity with larger, essential elements of the cosmos. Day breaks; morning becomes; afternoon moves; evening closes. This cycle exists so deeply in humans that we may not be fully aware of or attuned to its rhythms. Yet, we are inescapably connected to the movement of our life through time and space. Occasionally, we are fortunate enough to see the shifts and changes that have occurred in us in a particular season of living. More likely, though, we exist and move within circles of assumption, believing days, events and circumstance are beyond us or happen to us.

However, if we pause to listen and focus, we might find ourselves treated to a new worldview. We might discover far more pattern and purpose in our biographies than we had previously claimed. Our life stories, rather than being disparate fragments, can be understood as a more integrated endeavor.

Four key rhythms emerge in any season of living: anticipating, attending, appreciating and accepting. These rhythms may occur in quick succession or there may be larger segments of time between them. To familiarize ourselves with these rhythms, we need to name them, practice them, linger with them. Listed below are the four categories, and the ideas that describe them.

Anticipate — Look to what is coming; consider possibilities; yearn; live in the "I hope, I want" frame of mind.

Attend — Pay attention to what's needed; engage; consider; nurture and care; develop and clarify.

Appreciate — Enjoy; see the fullness; feel satisfaction; be aware of happiness and joy; cherish the gift.

Accept — Recognize what is; let go of what is undone or unfulfilled; claim essence.

We have divided the photographs and writing into these four categories. It gives you the opportunity to engage each rhythm and invite awareness of it into your living. In so doing, you will become more naturally aware of these shifts and more present to your own internal and external changes.

As you proceed through these pages, focus on the four rhythms and their place in you. Observe how and where they exist in others and in nature. Integrate the energy of these rhythms into your own consciousness, and invite the cosmic dance to begin.

Enjoy the fullness and richness of autumn!

Journaling Basics

Whether you are new to journaling or have been engaging this practice for some time, it helps to remember a few basic principles that can help you stay on track.

Claim a Space

To journal, find a place that is uniquely yours, at least for the time you are working. Size doesn't matter, but it is crucial to have a sense that "this is where I write in my journal." If you don't have access to a room, or a desk, a favorite chair is a good candidate. Collect two or three items that hold value or significance for you. This might include a photo, candle, rock, shell or other treasured memento. Keep them near your chosen space, or in a small basket with your journal and pen so you can be surrounded by their comfort, connection, and security.

Settle Your Mind

Of course, this is a challenging task. Your days are filled with a multitude of demands and activities. Initial quiet time often releases anxiety about "all the things I have to complete." Let those feelings come, but reassure yourself these concerns and tasks will be tended to later. If you're worried about forgetting, write a brief list on a card and put it aside for later.

Breathe

Really, breathe. Inhale. Exhale. Do this slowly, with increasing focus and concentration. Take three cleansing breaths by inhaling deeply through your nose with the tip of your tongue placed on the roof of your mouth. When your lungs feel full, you can release the breath through your mouth making an audible sound. After the cleansing breaths, return to a normal pace of breathing, but keep aware of the rhythm, "breathe in, breathe out."

Focus Your Energy

Be present in your body. Make sure you feel comfortable. If you are thirsty, hungry or have other needs to address, do so before you begin to journal. Pay attention to your body signals, and tend to them as necessary. Be aware that you have a body and honor it as the receptive site for your experience.

Open Yourself

Seeking awareness of inner thoughts and feelings can provoke anxiety or fear. Often, our initial response is to close down or get distracted. Although it may not feel comfortable at first, good journaling requires letting down your guard and silencing your inner critic. Taking the risk to write out your thoughts and feelings is rewarding.

Commit Yourself

The path of examined living requires both determination and persistence. Remind yourself that you have deep inner knowledge to tap. The value of knowing and understanding your motives and purposes makes regular reflection a commitment worth keeping.

Begin to Write

When all these steps are in place, take up your pen! Use the guided reflection in the journal as a starting point. Highlight a phrase or word from the poem that stirred feelings in you. Note the memory or curiosity evoked by the photograph. Begin to write in any style or length you choose. Record your thoughts, feelings, hopes, dreams or sensations. Do it again, and again, and again. Now you are journaling!

Turn the page to begin the journey through *Autumn!*

Transformation

Great world religions point toward divinity within.
It's a spark, or a remnant, sometimes a possibility
discovered on the path we walk
that transforms us and makes us greater;
more true and valuable.
These sumac leaves bear a similar imprint:
the green power of summer carefully shading red.
Bright burst of color announces greater purpose and we,
walking this autumnal path,
pause to marvel and wonder at such transformation.

Reflect

Fall color emerges when the conditions are right; when the sunlight shifts and the temperature drops. The color is always there, embedded within the genetic leaf code, but it takes a particular sequence of events to reveal itself. Like the divinity that resides within us, but is sometimes unseen, what conditions bring about transformation in your life so that you and others can see it?

This autumn, I anticipate:

Engage

Look at people who are familiar to you. Try to see past their outward appearance to their divine inner energy. See how they transform in your eyes as you consider their underlying precious gifts.

Bug Juice

When green begins to fade, the chlorophyll retreating
with ever shortening days, the aster erupts.
Bright hued and tiny, the magnificent display
of rich purple and shocking pink waves six feet high,
capturing our attention.
It's not only the bees and butterflies who depend
on this last bit of nectar.
We, too, crave the color and beauty of early fall wonder.

Reflect

Just when you start to think something is over, new delight emerges with a flourish. The delicately-fringed asters with their shocking pink and purple blooms have been busy working all summer to attain their height and position in the early fall garden. Their delightful explosion comes in time to rally us and remind us of endless gifts. What gifts of life are you celebrating right now? What tiny, bright energy is emerging in you? What summer growth will launch your fall with a flourish?

This autumn, I anticipate:

Engage

Take a walk in your neighborhood or a near-by park. Collect items that will nourish your spirit and imagination over the next few weeks of the season.

Come Out of Your Shell

Burst, sunflower!

September, and the fields still full of golden-yellow wonder.

Bits of sunlight linger in petals, gentle reminder of blazing orb.

Black-seeded center absorbing light, its dark energy an overpowering attraction.

Magnificent proportion and massive presence call out.

Creatures approach you in awe.

You linger, shy wonder, in a momentary home.

Come out of your shell, sunflower!

More awaits than you've ever imagined!

Reflect

Sunflowers diligently follow the sun during the day, their bright petals always turning toward the warming rays. In order to accomplish this daily feat, their stalks grow tall and thick to support the heavy, rotating heads. It takes an entire growing season to achieve this firmness and stability. Once in bloom goodness appears in a harvest of seeds providing sustenance and nurture for many. Where are you growing tall and thick to support your beautiful, late bloom?

This autumn, I anticipate:

Engage

Track the sun through the course of the day, noticing it at several points in time. Observe how others are enjoying the sun's warmth in these latter days of summer. Check a website for the position of the sun's orbit in September.

Spiral

Perfect energy emanates from perfect form.

Deep within the spiral, feel the life force.

Stand transfixed in the power.

Circling movement calls us into the center and sends us out again.

Walk the labyrinth mystery with your mind's eye.

Waves of undulating strength release from the core, tell the secret.

Each drying stalk of grass integrated, transformed to greater being.

Reflect

The varied forms of nature remind us that life is nonlinear. We are often confronted with layers and curving paths. One layer overlaps the next, and the previous. Time unfolds as a blending and rotation through seasons, not a time line with key events, isolated from one another. Connect with a layer of your life. Take time to remember where you were last fall. What did you enjoy? What experiences would you prefer not to repeat?

This autumn, I anticipate:

Engage

Eat layered food: seven-layered salad, a napoleon, a piece of filled cake, pizza, lasagna. Be sure to enjoy each individual ingredient. Be sure to revel in the fullness of the merged flavors.

Elemental

Basic, fundamental to human existence.
Celebration and spirits.
Humanity has tasted, touched, altered fruit
into more fecund matter.
Luxuriant, flowing wine.
Grapes endowed from their beginning
with sweetness, and alluring fragrance.
Drawing us close to expose and explore
their precious juicy center, we give thanks.
Elemental.

Reflect

From sacrament to bacchanalia, grapes lend power to human gatherings, inciting a desire for a taste of "more." Perfectly packaged in rich, vibrant reds, deep purples, and enticing, lively greens, their pulpy flesh gives way to sweet juice as they are pressed and reduced to a concentrated essence. The bountiful clusters of fruit give a hint of their power. In what ways are you longing for a taste of "more?" How is some portion of your life perfectly packaged? What concentrated essence of your spirit is providing sweet liquid for yourself or others?

This autumn, I anticipate:

Engage

Create a cluster diagram by drawing circles that touch one another. Inside the circles, write your feelings, your life celebrations, your gifts, your friendships, your wishes for the future. You will soon have the rich wine of your life in front of you.

Your Turn

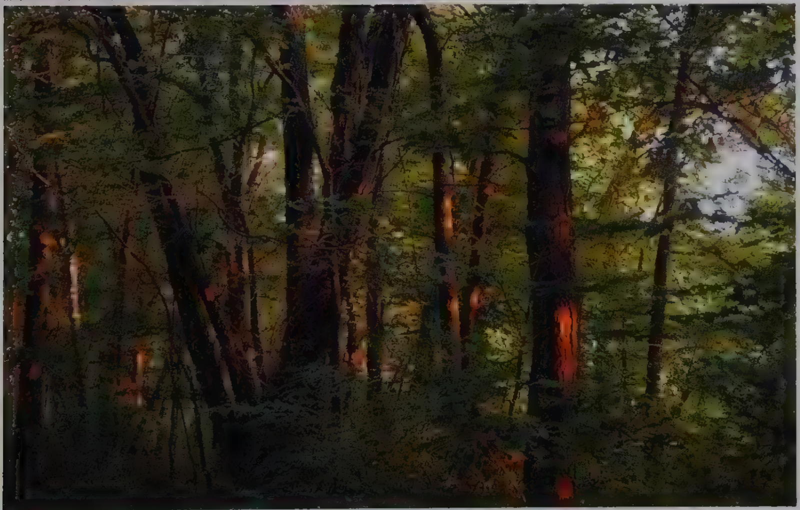
The red sun fades into dusk
bouncing off tree trunks like a laser pointer.
Quantity and strength of light recede.
Necessary now for the tree to make its stand
and relinquish these potent sunset colors.

The red leaf falls, shines its energy
into the ancient wood.
Reacquainting the forest floor with sunlight's quiet gift.

Reflect

In this season we notice the leaves falling from the trees. Touched by moments of sadness at the loss of green abundance, we realize leaves can't last forever! The reds appear as the dominant greens recede. The new coloration reminds us that energy is recycled, reused and reintegrated, but never lost. Where are the places you find your energy shifting? How does that movement reinvigorate another place of living?

This autumn, I anticipate:



Engage

Shift your energy! Go from sitting or resting to movement. Or, stop your frantic schedule and sit quietly. Notice the physical and mental changes you encounter.

Ghost Cap

Treasured finds begin now in autumn —
ripening colorful berries, assorted hard-shelled nuts,
a perfectly formed fungus.
Mushroom, your earthy, musky odor
reminds us of impending descent to decay.
Leaves, twigs, vegetables that matured too late for harvest
all become part of the compost.
Soon our yards and gardens will be filled with remains.
And you, little, white ghost cap,
call us to reverence in this life transition.

Reflect

Were it not for fungi, new life would not emerge. Fallen matter becomes fodder for mushrooms and lichens alike. Their growth creates bite-size pieces for emerging green plants. What a marvel of nature that turns a twig or branch into dirt! The mushroom's cap protects delicate fans of spores poised to spread and engage their recycling power. How do you take the growth in your own life experience, digest it and recycle it to the season ahead? What protects the inspirations you have for the future?

This autumn, I attend:

Engage

Eat mushrooms — raw in your salad or sautéed gently in white wine and butter. Take a walk in the woods and look down. Observe logs and branches covered with fungi, busy recycling nutrients back to the earth.

Birch

The protective layers peeled off the surface, who knows how?
Some wild wind, some animal scratching an itch?
Some human hand seeking to touch the wonder
of wonderfully thin birch bark layers,
thereby capturing an essence of nature?
Some unfolding plan to refashion birch skin
into something lovely or useful?
Scarred now below, tall and slender trees
reach toward the sun, their upper trunks impervious
and perfectly white, sending healing energy
into the nether region.

Reflect

To live means to be marked with scars. This is the way of humanity. How do you resist letting scars define you? How do you accept that life grows beyond painful moments and experiences? In the fullness of life, how do you dare to live upward and forward, past the scars?

This autumn, I attend:

Engage

Look in the mirror. Note your imperfections and scars. Take inventory of the beauty and strength that has healed and minimized their impact on you.

Careless

They've been around long enough to move in and out of fashion.
Traditionally a hit in the late fall landscape, chrysanthemum's beauty
can bloom even through a light frost. Sold in gallon size
to use in fall decorating (pair with gourds, pumpkins, apples)
little effort is made to preserve even the hardy varieties.
Set in place, used for a season, then discarded.
Without thought, without care, without the happiness of observing
the journey from leaf to bud to flower.
What adventure we miss in the search for ease and appearance.

Reflect

Disposability is a trademark of our society. Sometimes it is necessary and even essential to dispose. Yet if we act without thought or reflection, we risk losing something very important. In the life of "instant gratification" and "throw away" what do you miss? Is there a level of knowledge or discovery you need to reclaim? Where are you seeking a deeper understanding? What do you need to retain for a time to aid you in your search?

This autumn, I attend:

Engage

Choose a common activity in your life and move back a few steps. Cook something from scratch. Write a letter with paper and pen. Walk instead of using a car.

Release

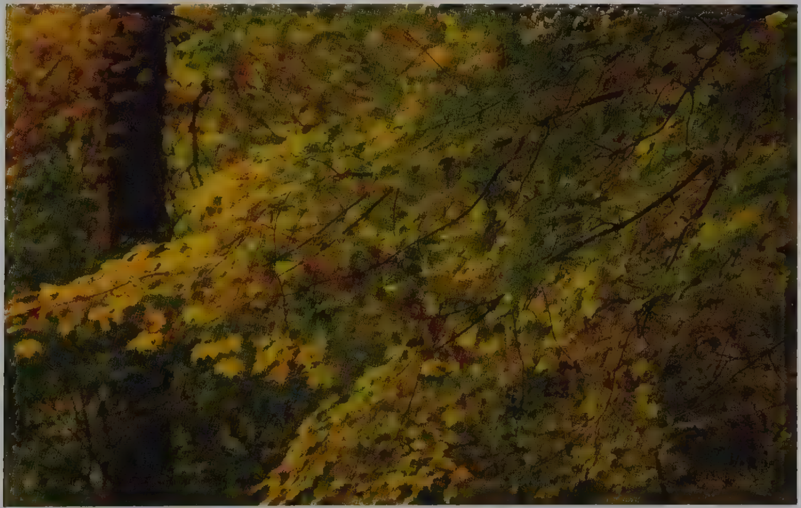
To what shall I compare thee, o beauteous leaf of gold?
Is it to marble statues or paintings splendid and old?
Is it to the sun, an orb shimmering with yellow light?
Is it to stars and moon that radiantly pierce the night?

Most glorious and wildly free, abundant twigs you dress.
Ready to release yourself, quivering with restlessness.
To fly, to fall, to dance on air before you rest on ground.
Perfectly offered leafen self, heaven's treasure come down.

Reflect

Vast landscapes colored in golds, oranges and red are an incredible sight to behold. Painted mountainsides, even witnessed once, create a memory that will linger for years. Can you see yourself as a golden object of importance? Can you believe that your being has captured earth's full energy and has the power to reflect it back around you in goodness and largesse? Can you feel pride and satisfaction in your giftedness and accomplishments?

This autumn, I attend:



Engage

Give yourself a pat on the back! Write a list of your accomplishments. Don't be shy! Note the many unique gifts you have to share with others. (Use yellow paper!)

October Day

October day when the sky is Indian summer blue.

Grasshoppers fly, their wings spread wide.

Apples shining brightly, red under October sun.

Butterflies dance in the air, talking butterfly talk.

Leaves falling down.

Children running fast.

Oh, why can't it last, this lovely October day?

Reflect

These words reflect an iconic day, that moment when all our images focus in a selective way toward precious memory. Becoming a positive touchstone, we can return to a particular moment in life that can sustain and nurture us over and over again. How can you practice creating iconic moments now? In what way can you reframe an experience to choose its positive aspects? How can everyday moments become iconic moments?

This autumn, I attend:

Engage

Look at icons – famous paintings, religious images, landmarks. Connect what you see to a feeling of beauty and wonder. Over the next several days, return to that precious feeling and memory and hold on to it until you can retrieve the sensation with ease.

One Good Apple

The apple man came by every October,
selling apples from the back of his 1940's pick-up truck.
By the crate you could get them cheaply, even less for windfalls
(which made perfectly good applesauce and apple butter and apple juice,
despite their slight damage).

The top crop, so round, so faultless.
I always wished we could have bought the good ones,
the ones whose white, crisp, firm flesh crunched under the power of molars,
releasing sweetness and juice you could wipe away
with the back of your hand and then lick,
twice the treat.

Reflect

A windfall, in some quarters, is considered to be an unexpected bounty. In the apple world, a fruit earns that name by falling to the ground. The resulting bruise appears as a soft, brown spot on the inner flesh. The minor lack of perfection is no deterrent to flavor, yet it contributes to the image of the apple as second rate. What are the ways you capture goodness from a windfall? Where do you create a reserve for yourself?

This autumn, I attend:

Engage

Find a U-Pick apple orchard and examine apples on the tree and on the ground. Observe the differences between them. Eat an apple and enjoy every bite.

Childish Dreams

Childhood conceit suggests that moment in time
was the best in our lives.
Floating free, undisturbed by adult responsibility,
we remember playing, exploring, discovering.

See the milkweed pod.
It's soft, silky insides ready for our grasp
and touch and wonder.
We reach to send wisps of filament
sailing into new horizons.
What delight and power!

Is it too much to dream
we could manage as much with our selves?

Reflect

The best time in life is always now, because that is where you are. Life can be like a perpetual milkweed pod, with each tiny feather containing the seeds for renewal. How endless! Who knows where the wind will carry them? Incredible vectors, air currents and jet streams move the downy, feathery filaments. What can you do today to believe in yourself again, and let your seeds of creativity fly wide and wild?

This autumn, I appreciate:

Engage

Seize the day! Stop and play! A few minutes, a few hours, the whole day. If you're too embarrassed to play with someone else, sneak off by yourself and enjoy the happiness of free time.

The New Standard in Pretty

Warty, crusty skin; crooked, curved, twisty stem;
bulbous purple, orange and beige kernels.
Who proclaimed these oddkins beautiful, worthy
of centerpiece on our dining tables?
Is it the deepening beige and brown creeping over the landscape
that makes us desperate for color?
Is it the impending celebration of Halloween, when the out-of-place
becomes commonplace? Is it revised standards,
our ability to appreciate conforming to the material at hand?

Reflect

Novelty is an essential life ingredient; creating interest and confronting the monotony of conformity. Each of us has an odd or quirky habit or behavior. It's marvelous how these oddities put together can create a collective beauty. Instead of chiding yourself for "failing by comparison," list your unique characteristics that help create the wonderful fabric of your life, warts and all!

This autumn, I appreciate:

Engage

Practice treasuring the atypical. In your next people encounter, imagine each one gathered as a different type of squash with warty skin or twisted stems. Appreciate the diversity.

Low Life

Decaying stumps.

Old, dead branches full of rot.

Curled parchment bark and leaves linger on the ground.

Low-life bracken and moss form fungus shelves.

Do field mice and nuthatches have tea parties here?

Find contentment at symbiotic tables that nature paints

in green, in brown, in ever lovely off-white.

Oh, the low life! Its richness abounds!

Reflect

There is no such thing as living alone, no matter how often we lift the cultural ideal of independence. Symbiosis is the expression of nature's reality; one lifeform dependent on another. Moss and lichens dominate nature's underworld. They toil endlessly on our behalf to perpetuate life, even though we don't usually witness or recognize their contribution. Is their some low-life task you can take on today? What are the rewards of toil and dirty work? Identify the pleasure and respect yourself as you complete the lowly work.

This autumn, I appreciate

Engage

Fill a cup with dirt and keep it in a prominent place. Every day, remember one dirty work task that makes other aspects of life possible.

Pumpkin Connection

Your sturdy stem, remnant of relationship
to the vine that nurtured you, grew you, birthed you
into fullness remains as testament to your origins.
Useful as a handle for the cut-off top
which will grace your soon to be carved face.
The hollow stem, still strong and beautiful,
whispers connection. Acts as umbilical cord
between plant and fully-formed flesh set forth on its own journey:
life toward death.
A potent reminder, like the Halloween holiday.
We celebrate matter and spirit blurring across thin lines.
Our own life path curves us forward: life toward death.

Reflect

Every human life is first nurtured with an umbilical cord. Cut so that we might live our own precious life, the metaphor and reality of connection is powerful for us. What umbilical cords of connection have sustained you? Which have been cut to send you on to another moment of living? Where are the life-giving vines of energy and hope that call you to attachment?

This autumn, I appreciate:

Engage

Get a pumpkin. Marvel at its size. Just a few weeks ago there was nothing but a seed, and now there is much to admire — the thick, nourishing skin protecting a cornucopia of seeds inside.

Color Burst

Red painted across landscape's face,
here and there in bits and pieces.
Fortunate are we to observe.
Soon dullness will set in hard.
Brown, gold, faded beige will whisper in their way,
with their peculiar charm, but never this.
Not splash, not verve, not daring.
Not red.

Reflect

Red should scream and get our attention loud and clear, like the red light, the red stop sign, the flashing warning. How often do you move right through the red, walking over it, passing by it, too busy or preoccupied with something else? Red says: Now is the moment! Now is the message! Pay attention! What red signs in your life are shrieking at you and calling you to stop and take notice? Are you listening to these signals, or ignoring them?

This autumn, I appreciate:

Engage

Stop, look, listen! Take the moment when it presents itself to practice halting, seeing and assessing what is going on. Deliberately use the color red as a trigger to pay close attention.

Aboriginal Dreams

A painting these leaves make
captured on the surface of this shallow water.
Monet comes to mind, his near blind paintings, brush strokes creating effect.
Or perhaps the pontillists Pissaro and Seurat, who through tiny dots made beauty.
The aboriginals, whose representational style called out the dreamtime.

My dreamtime is with you, leaves.
Scattered over this surface decaying slowly till you be
but broad brush strokes of impression;
small dots of leaf matter;
line and shape calling us to dreamtime
to make of our lives in this season spiritual wisdom.

Reflect

Layers of leaves lie on the water's surface. The static image creates an impression, gives a certain sense of reality and stability. But it's hard to distinguish exactly what is happening. Are the leaves floating, or sinking? How long will this picture stay the way it is? What criteria do you apply to judge what appears to be reality? How do you name the flow in your life and create the painting that represents you?

This autumn, I appreciate:

Engage

View some of the great impressionistic and pointillist paintings or aboriginal drawings. Experiment with your own dots and brushstrokes. Notice how the marks, perhaps nothing on their own, together create a whole scene.

Bare Limbs

Each silhouetted branch stands out in the sunlight.
Distinguishable, discernable. At long last we can see
through the woods, each tree its own.
Daylight shades toward dusk, and stalwart giants merge,
gathering in bare-limbed embrace.

A mass of darkness emerges before the dark actually comes
as icing water captures thickly-tangled energy,
no reflection shimmering on the surface.

Solid solidarity.
Comfort there is in this nightly embrace
for them, for us.

Reflect

Finally in this autumn season, we've reached a point where we can see the forest through the trees. We can even see past them! It's rare in our lives to genuinely see beyond the moment that embroils us. But once in a while, we're offered a brief glimpse. How do you adjust to the differing contexts of the short view versus the long view? How do you make peace with reality that shifts between clarity and convergence? Do you have guideposts and companions to help you with these important tasks?

This autumn, I accept:

Engage

Find an empty deciduous forest or vista where you can see close up and far away at the same time. Identify which senses you use for each task. Consider what each view offers.

Persistence

Leather-like, tough-skinned leaves are slow
to depart the tree. Rustling and rattling well into winter,
persistence recites its mantra.
"Hang with it, stick to it," becomes the creed of the day.
On the ground, piles cluster and mound, resist deterioration.
Fall rains cover, snow attacks, but with little success.
The pin oak persists and dominates, last leaf to disappear.

Reflect

Persistence overcomes all else. When others suggest it's time to give up, but you can't seem to let go, perhaps it is time to gird yourself and persist. In making that decision, consider these questions: Is the persistence worthy, and does it have goodness in intent and outcome? Is the persistence linked to a stubborn refusal to change, or to maintain comfort or privilege? What vision do you hold to that will take you through the curves and bends to the next place? What is the overall goal of your persistence?

This autumn, I accept:

Engage

Finish a project, a small or large one. Persist past previous obstacles. Get help if you need it. Reap some of the benefits of persistence found in the moment of completion.

Surprise

Snow's early trace can catch us off-guard, surprise us.

Grass foolishly lingering, not quite dead.

Leaves awaiting their final mulching, not quite gone to dust.

Spruce trees peering upward, enjoying center stage as the last of green.

Surprise!

Dusty, white blanket.   Ice-covered crystals

laugh at us all.

Reflect

The unexpected can make us laugh, *if* we have enough strength to let ourselves enjoy being caught off guard. The first snow changes the landscape dramatically. A surprise can do likewise; it changes the context. If we allow, it can help us clear our vision to see life in a new way. Give thanks today for surprises, delayed plans and shifted routes. Accept and delight in the unanticipated, the unexpected and even the occasional unwanted.

This autumn, I accept:

Engage

Surprise yourself! Let others surprise you! Take a new route to work or on your daily walk. Eat something you've never tried before. Read a magazine about something you know nothing about. Create a little adventure for yourself!

Natural Progression

Look closer now to perceive life, uncover vitality
where you might delight in some discovery.
Easy, obvious, everywhere-you-turn is gone for the season
(unless you go tropical).
In this part of the world that witnesses seasons,
magnifying lenses are necessary.
The perfectly shaped walnut, soon to be hurried away
and hidden in a tree stump for later consumption.
The last bit of protein encrusted
deep inside a feathery seed head.
The faded grey outlines of last season's beautiful bloom.
These are the bouquets of fall: dried, hard, brown, grey,
faded, golden, tallgrass stems.
Filling our vases and minds with natural progression.

Reflect

When all is said and done in this life, we are left with skeletons and seeds for the future. Outward beauty fades, overtaken by something greater than us. Physical bodies are the tools for genetic possibility and the seeds we pass on. Today, what seed of hope or what seed of kindness will you plant? What seed of thought or what seed of change will emerge from you? What seed of encapsulated life will you give for tomorrow's new day?

This autumn, I accept:

Engage

Eat nuts and seeds like a squirrel, enjoying every bite. Set out seeds for backyard animals. Watch how readily they find the cache of nourishment. Close your eyes and envision the outcome of a seed planted today.

A Good Land

"For the Lord is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks, water, wheat, barley, vines, fig trees, honey, a land in which you will lack nothing…" Deuteronomy 8:7-9

It's what they dreamed of, those first faithful Pilgrims.
A good land. A land that could sustain them, nurture them,
free them to worship and follow the good God they claimed.
When they arrived on this shore to discover rocks, woods,
the light spilling from the west like a sign of promise,
they prayed thanks for a good land. As the natives
helped them learn plants and animals, hew and hoe
and hurriedly prepare for winter's onslaught,
they celebrated together in thanks for the good land.
In that first winter, as they sickened and died,
grew pale and frail as corn husks, hard and withered as field corn,
how often did they remember the good land?

Reflect

We celebrate Thanksgiving as a time of bounty and gathering. People of all religions, and people of no religion, find reason to give thanks. The daunting task of settling a new land proved costly for the early immigrants. Yet we have memorialized them in the posture of thanks. What risk have you taken or change have you made, that while both daunting and costly, moved you toward thanksgiving?

This autumn, I accept

Engage

Write a thank-you letter to someone who stood by and steadied you in a time of difficulty. Identify a person or situation where you can lend that kind of aid.

Fat Rain

November moisture, pelting and beating hard
against windows and branches. Fat rain, so full of itself!
Carrying along the energy of its ice-filled cousins
with all their fury and power. Soon enough, when the sun moves
on toward the other side of the world, the conspiracy of cold will
overcome the grass, the shrubs, the tender evergreen needles.
No need then for assistance from rain, frost will pull moisture
from the breath of every living being
coating crystal ice-white from low to high and back again.
Sufficiently warned, fat rain retreats, makes way for winter snow.

Reflect

Delightful and encouraging, fall rain settles the dust of summer and releases the colorful leaves en masse. Eventually the landscape turns to a colder, more dreary form of moisture. Above, the grey clouds lie pregnant, heavy with thicker precipitation. Nature's quixotic way of shifting from liquid to solid to liquid at this time of year can incite wild speculation, and sometimes dread. How do you experience shape-shifting in your own life? Do you derive a sense of power from these transformations? Do they drain or expand your energy?

This autumn, I accept

Engage

Make ice candles. Fill one large container with water, and place a smaller one in the center. After it's frozen, remove the small container and replace with a candle. Light the candle, and enjoy the transition from solid to liquid.

Season Summary

Congratulations! You've tasted well-seasoned living! Interacting with this season as your context and teacher, take time to make notes about your experience. Below are questions to assist you in your summary.

What were some of your favorite finds in nature during this season? Mark your calendar for next year to be ready to enjoy them!

What were your best expressions of creativity in your journal this season? Writing, drawing, lists, the addition of a photo or memento – which felt most energizing? Were there other creative endeavors that grew from your guided reflections?

Where did you experience an altered outlook or sensation because of your intentional journal work? How did you hold onto these new perspectives and integrate them into your worldview?

Reviewing the Season's Rhythms

Anticipate – What anticipations for the season were fulfilled? How were you surprised during this season?

Attend – In what ways did you attend to the tasks and routines that helped you become more consciously connected to the deep rhythm of the season?

Appreciate – Where did appreciation take root in you? When did you share your appreciation with those around you?

Accept– Did you uncover a spirit of acceptance within yourself? What situations of concern were eased by moving toward this place?

Next Season

How do you plan to relate to winter? What are some of your favorite activities for winter? How will your well seasoned living journal assist you in attaining your goals for the season ahead?

The Writings—Vicki Kessler

My earliest companion was the outdoors. River, rocky bluffs, woods, gardens, trees, eagles – all these spoke to me in a language that entered my consciousness that I now, at midlife, am barely beginning to comprehend. I had the silent wisdom of ancient civilizations beneath my feet, sending me signals in their mounded remains. I walked the sandy beaches of the Mississippi, collecting shells and skeletons of the animals who enjoyed this landscape of sky, water and land as much as I did.

Of course, in conjunction with this outdoor companion, I had the words of poets, writers, teachers, family and friends to provide some mechanism of socialization; some effort at interpretation. I had words of wisdom from those who had for years lived on the land and could provide tales of its abundance, its beauty, its danger. As I grew, I discovered my own words, and began to use them in ways that described what I saw, tasted, touched, felt and heard.

My imagination has been nurtured by the natural and social worlds that surround me. It seems fitting that the invitation I extend to those who would engage the process of this guided journal is a combination of words and images, along with exercises that invite you to make companions of the realities that abound in infinite variety.

May you be gifted and rewarded with the joy of uncovering secrets – both your own, and those that have lay hidden at your feet (or over your head) – awaiting this moment of discovery. To the journey! May it ever unfold in wonder before you!

The Photographs—MaraBeth Soneson

The natural world is a venerable mentor, patient and full of wisdom. The seasons provide the ultimate rhythm for life; comforting in their dependability and predictability, each with a unique rendition of the familiar pattern. Scientifically explained by latitude, orbit and axis tilt, the seasons appear to us as an extravagant sensory experience.

My early connections with nature were nurtured in the flower gardens of my grandmother. The terraced beds provided a labyrinth of color and fragrance that served as the backdrop to many playtime fantasies. All of the senses were inspired in those moments on the hill. Feeling quite important and purposeful, I would trail my father down a garden row in our home garden scooping up potatoes as he would turn the rich, black earth. Today, I find the rediscovery of each season as a mission in understanding the larger picture – the ultimate in "putting things in perspective." The micro-seasons within the season are revealed in small clues that are unrelentingly sequential and orderly. The transient flowering stage of a plant offers an endless subject for the camera's eye – the bloom dazzles with color while shapes and textures dance in changing light.

The phrase "being grounded" has become synonymous with being centered or balanced. We have forgotten the literalness of the phrase and the magic that happens in our lives when we connect with the earth and its fruits. Recapturing the rhythm, the sights and sounds available in the natural world is a refreshing process and an amazing gift available to each of us as we celebrate our everyday lives.

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Praise for ***Well Seasoned Living***

This is an exceptional book. It makes a great gift, as well as offering a guide for individual and/or group process.

Joyce Rupp, *OSM,*
author of ***Prayer***

No matter how steady the weather outside our window, our hearts are seasonal. In ***Well Seasoned Living***, the authors use a beautiful blend of words and images to invite us to embrace and learn from the seasons of our lives. This is a lovely book—a gift that will serve as a window to your life experiences. Read it, savor it, write in it and from it. You will learn from and love the seasons of your life.

James Stephen Behrens, *OCSO,*
author & photographer of ***Portraits of Grace***

Truly this book, with its bold imagery of creation, poetic language, and gentle guidance, offers a simple recipe for savoring the seasons as we travel through them. This is one of those little treasures that can keep us aware of the sacred in our midst!

Mary Ruth Broz, *RSM and* ***Barbara Flynn***,
co-authors of ***Midwives of an Unnamed Future***

Recognize the power and magnitude of your unique presence in the world with ***Well Seasoned Living***. Integrating photography and poetry, while engaging readers with contemplative writing and activities, this book serves as a twice-weekly guided spiritual reflection designed to inspire and invigorate.

Well Seasoned Living: Autumn invites readers to linger in the remnants of warmth during the fall season. As nature's colors reach their peak and the world prepares for winter, this book explores life's big questions within the context of nature's little lessons.

Readers are asked to:

- **Anticipate** the possibilities to come
- **Attend** to the world around them
- **Appreciate** the beauty that surrounds them
- **Accept** what life brings and make it theirs

For everything there is a season,
a time for every matter under heaven.
– Ecclesiastes 3:1

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